THE BLACK FAMILY: CHANGING VIEWS OF SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

CRYSTAL V. RHODES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DECEMBER 1973

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the last four decades of the twentieth century, the forces of social change have affected the lives of black American's dramatically. These thirty-odd years have produced traumatic changes in the ideology of a great deal of black Americans toward many of the country's institutions, social, political and economic.

The dynamics of certain significant events, particularly in the area of Civil Rights, has generated much sociological interest in one of the most controversial institutions of black Americans, the family. Since the 1940's, as the effects of social changes on the black family in American society became more apparent, social scientists have produced numerous studies and articles on the subject, making various observations about the existing social conditions of the black family.

Prior to this period of time, social scientists who studied family life in America ignored the black family. Andrew Billingsley, in Black Families in White America,[1] denoted several reasons for this attitude. In the latter

---

[1]Andrew Billingsley, Black Families in White America (New Jersey, 1968).

part of the nineteenth century, the black family, recently released from slavery, had no recognized position as an organized family in society. By the early twentieth century, a period of humanitarianism, prevailed in society; poverty and its affect upon the family was a major area of study. Still no recognition was given to the black family, concentration was on the urban poor, and the black family had not become a working force in the urban areas. By the 1920's, the study of the middle class family became the vogue. The major area of concentration was the adjustment and happiness of middle class families. Once more, black families were ignored; the overwhelming majority of blacks did not fit into the category of middle class.

It was not until the decades of the late 1930's and into the 1940's that studies of Negro life became prevalent. This discovery of the black man was a result of two stated factors:

> ....the first factor which accounts for this discovery is broadly social in the sense that the whole society, including all of its important elements, was in trouble and deserved to be studied--the second factor was the emergence of Negro scholars, who could not ignore the Negro family precisely for the same reasons that white scholars could, and did....[1]

It is from this decade to the present that this study will review the social changes in America, and the impact which these changes had on the black family's development.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 204.

It will also investigate and discuss studies which were made over this period of time about the black family, and the shifts in ideology which societal changes have had on the content of these studies.

It is important that the evolution of the contemporary black family be understood in its present perspective; therefore, Chapter II is a historic review of the black family in America from slavery through emancipation and urbanization.

Chapter III reviews the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's, focusing on the changes in these decades as they were reflected in any noticeable shifts in the black family, being observed by social scientists. Chapter IV concentrates on the contemporary black family of the 1970's, and the major sociological studies of the time. The impact of the ideology of the sixties upon the black family is reflected in these sociological studies, and will be discussed as well.

Chapter V, the concluding chapter, is a discussion of the sociological studies cited in this paper, and a brief review of the ideologies of several of these sociologists.

Purpose and Scope

There are several purposes behind this study, one of which is to make an examination of the effect which social and political events, specifically in the area of Civil Rights in the past thirty-odd years, have had on the economic and social advancement of the black family. Secondly, these

changes which have occurred within each decade have caused shifts in the black community's attitudes toward itself and in its ideology toward American society in general, the effect which this has had on the institution of the black family, within the community, will be examined and discussed as well. In addition, these societal changes and the shifts in attitudes and ideas which have resulted within the black community, have had an effect on the way in which social scientists have viewed the black family over this period of time. The primary purpose of this research is to review major studies made by social scientists in each decade, and note the parallel between the societal changes and the changes in the way social scientists view the black family through these years.

Methodology

The method used for the subsequent investigation of this research was a systematic review of all of the monographs, articles, and bibliographical aids available during the course of preparing for this study. Of special assistance to this writer in researching this topic has been an unpublished thesis by an Atlanta University graduate in the department of Sociology, Carolyn Stroman, entitled "Toward a Sociology of the Black Family: A Bibliographic Essay."[1]

---

[1]Carolyn Stroman, "Toward a Sociology of the Black Family: A Bibliographic Essay" (unpublished Master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1973).

An exhaustive examination of the literature was undertaken to provide an insight as to the status of research on the black family. Articles from numerous periodicals, newspapers, and reference sources were examined. Extensive statistics, graphs, and charts were excluded for the purpose of simplicity. Each of the sources referred to are cited in the bibliography.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE BLACK FAMILY

Africa: Before Slavery

West Africa has been designated, by historians, as the region which provided the greatest source of human cargo for the American slave market. It is in this region that a complex, but stable form of family life can be found among African inhabitants.

Marriage, itself, is not an informal affair in West Africa. It is not simply a uniting of two consenting people into a common bond, as western society deems it today. It involves an elaborate process of ceremony and gift exchange between, and with the consenting approval of the two parties involved, their parents and their kin.

There are three basic forms of marriage in this region, monogamy, polyandry and polygamy. Polyandry, the system by which one woman is united with two or more men is almost unknown in this particular part of Africa, probably because of its impracticality; polygamy, one man united with two or more women, is common, but not the most dominant type of marriage. The majority of the populus could not afford it. Therefore, monogamy, one woman and one man united in marriage is the most common, and the most dominant form of marriage

throughout this part of Africa.[1]

In accord with the pervasive systems of marriage one finds in this region three basic patterns of kinship or descent which bind the children of West African marriages. Double descent, the first form of kinship, is the least common form. Through this descent, kinship is recognized through both the male and female. The second form of kinship, matrilineal descent is the second most acknowledged; this form of descent recognizes the children's kinship through the mother's side of the family. However, the most common and widely recognized form of descent is patrilineal, when kinship is recognized through the father's side of the family.[2]

It is this emphasis put on the importance of the male members of African society, which Billingsley refers to in the following description of West African family life:

> The most striking feature of African family and community life was the strong dominant place in family and society assigned to and assumed by the men. This strong, masculine dominance, however, far from being capricious authoritarianism was supported, guided and limited by custom and tradition, which also provided a substantial role for the women. The children were provided a quality of care and protection not common in modern societies, for they belonged not alone to their father and mother, but also, and principally to the wider kinship group.[3]

---

[1]Billingsley, op. cit., pp. 42-3.

[2]Ibid., p. 42.

[3]Ibid., p. 40.

Therefore, it was this form of complex, but stable, familial relationships which was disrupted when white traders enslaved their captives. Roles for males and females, previously defined and carried out throughout countless generations, became forgotten memories as the salve endured the misery of the Middle Passage, the atrocities of the West Indies, and the final degradation and demoralization of the American slave system itself.

Family Life Under Slavery

> The marriage institution cannot exist among slaves and one-sixth of the population of democratic America is denied it privileges by the law of the land. What is to be thought of a nation boasting of its liberty, boasting of its humanity, boasting of its love of justice and purity, and yet having within its own borders three million of persons denied by law the right of marriage?--what must be the condition of that people.[1]

This quotation was an excerpt from a speech given by Frederick Douglass in England, in 1846. His description of the institution of marriage among slaves, or rather the lack of it, reveals the total process which the slave system in America took in reducing humans to the level of chattel.

Marriages among slaves were literally at the mercy of their masters. If a marriage between two slaves was sanctioned by the master, the ceremony was simple. The two consenting parties leaped over a broom a designated number of times and often a slave preacher would preside. However,

---

[1]Arnold Adoff, ed., Black on Black: Commentaries by Negro Americans (Toronto, Ontario, 1968), p. 7.

these unions were fragile. Mates could be sold and separated from each other at the master's whim.

More often then not, consent for any sort of slave unions were given to favored house slaves and artisans, and those marriages which survived the uncertainties of slavery, remained fairly stable. The slaves patterned their marriages after the family patterns of the white majority, with whom they worked in such close proximity. In such marriages, the master continued to emasculate the male, and made him subordinate to his wife by referring to their cabin, children and even the husband as the woman's possession.

Generally, however, marriage and a stable family life was not possible for the majority of slaves under this system, The slave system was not conducive to the various aspects such an institution as marriage would entail. Fatherhood, under slavery, had no meaning when the father of a child had no responsibilities toward the child, and no say so over its life. The master fulfilled all of his slaves minimal needs. Promiscuity was encouraged for the sake of economics, and sometimes the masters' personal lust; endorsement of these actions discouraged monogonous relationships.

Motherhood, even for many of the slaves who tried to form families, was equally as trying. Slave mothers rarely had any direct say so in the raising of their children. Slave children were usually left in the care of an older plantation slave, while their mothers worked in the fields all day. Later, these children might be sold away from their mothers,

and never heard from again.

Yet, the mother was often the most dependable of the two parents. Paternity of the children quite often was questionable, due to the promiscuity encouraged under the slave system, as mentioned earlier. Where the fathers of slave children could be removed from the home with little disruption in the child's life, the slave mother was needed by the child until it reached an age where it could survive on its own. Therefore, these, and other factors, contributed in distinguishing the slave mother as one of the most dominant forces in slave society.

The Free Negro Family

While stable family relationships under the slave system were not numerous, and precarious in nature, there were many which could be found among the free black population which were quite stable and secure. Free Negro families lived predominantly in the Northern states. They formed and increased in these areas through five major sources: (1) children born of free colored persons, (2) mulatto children born of free colored mothers, (3) mulatto children born of white servants or free women, (4) children of free Negro and Indian parentage, and (5) manumitted slaves.[1]

These free Negroes, particularly those in the North, possessed several similar characteristics. The majority of them, as indicated previously, were mulattos; the greatest

---

[1]E. Franklin Frazier, The Free Negro Family (Nashville, Tennessee, 1932), p. 2.

portion of them had some degree of skill and some degree of formal education.

Having adopted the ways and norms of the white majority, they sought to further distinguish themselves from the enslaved masses by adhering vigorously to the values and goals of the white majority. Great emphasis was put on family stability. Cultural training and educational achievement for their children were primary goals, and they worked industriously to attain these ends. Intermarriages between these families were encouraged and sanctions were imposed on those who violated these norms. Free families later became the aristocracy of black society, and the cultural heritage they instilled in their children, many of whom achieved various degrees of recognition in later years, still persist.

However, during the years of slavery, free families were regarded with the same scorn as their enslaved brethern. "Denied full rights and privileges of citizens deprived of equality in the courts, and restricted in their freedom of assembly and freedom of movement the so called free Negro shared many of the deprivations of the slave."[1]

Emancipation

Those former slave families who, at the time of emancipation had achieved some form of stability, made the transition

---

[1]C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York, 1966), p. 13.

from slavery to freedom somewhat smoothly. Other freed families whose bonds had not been strong under slavery found them strengthened as they toiled together toward the common goal of survival.

Yet, other freed families could not make the adjustment at all, as Lerone Bennet, Jr. describes in this passage from Before the Mayflower:

> In slavery, Negro males had been systematically emasculated. They had no say so over their children or their women. Now suddenly they were heads of households. Negro women who were not accustomed to taking orders, submitted to male authority with a great deal of selfconsciousness. Some men gave the whole thing up as a bad joke and wandered around the country. Some women proud, independent, headstrong, drove their men away.[1]

This period after emancipation, therefore, was one of great confusion. Men and women who had been systematically treated like animals were set free and expected to conform to norms and values of which they had little conception. The result was widespread social disorganization. Many men and women, wandered aimlessly and engaged in sexual relationships with no conjugal base, just as they had done in slavery.

It was the efforts of such organizations as the Freedmen's Bureau, a government established social service agency, which attempted to rectify the situation by explaining, and clarifying the rules of marriage, along with other

---

[1] Lerone Bennet, Jr., Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964 (Baltimore, Maryland, 1966), p. 188

functions. Churches, formed in almost every new freedmen's community contributed to this effort by expounding and reiterating to the ex-slaves their rights and duties as husbands and wives; they also provided formal services which legitilized their unions. Schools, formed for blacks during this time, contributed to the education of blacks concerning marriage, by teaching that marriage was a sanctioned and legalized institution, and by stressing its importance in western society.

In due course, more and more freedmen began to conform to the institutionalized form of marriage. Acceptance of these norms became a status symbol and for many, a sign of respectibility. Other freedmen accepted legalized marriage as a measure of confirming their status as free men and women, able to engage in the same forms of institutions as their former masters.

By conforming to the rules of marriage, freedmen had their unions legalized under the law, and legitimized any children born into this union. Penalties were to be imposed under legislation passed in some states after the Civil War upon those freedmen who violated the norms of marriage. However, when cases of desertion, bigamy and adultry did arise, these sanctions were not imposed. "The whites were so accustomed to polygamous relationships among slaves that they ignored violations of the norms and refused to consider

any complaints of investigation."[1]

Urbanization

By 1900 the black family in the southern rural area had undergone slavery, emancipation and reconstruction, yet, it had survived. Through each of these hardships their resiliency strengthened it.

By the beginning of the twentieth century sharecropping and farming had become the major sources of revenue for a large percentage of black families. Such labor often required the collective efforts of every family member.

Family life had acquired a degree of stability by this time. The black man had, in most families, established himself as the head of the household because, more then often, he was the primary breadwinner. However, life itself was hard. Jim Crow laws, enforced by the Klu Klux Klan, served to suppress any educational, political, and social gains made by blacks during Reconstruction. Economic gains were few if any.

Sharecropper families harvested crops for white land owners, working for long hours to pay debts which accumulated with each coming year. For many families, life was one step above that of slavery.

Families were usually extended units, consisting of the

---

[1]Jessie Bernard, Marriage and Family Among Negroes (New Jersey, 1966), p. 11.

father, mother and children and the spouses of these children; grandchildren were also included. It was not unusual to find a three generation family living under the same roof. Working hours were long and the work was strenuous, there was little time for social activity with so many mouths to feed and so little income. Each family member had his responsibility and was expected to carry out his duties for the family's welfare, what few social activities there were the church provided. It served as the most important catalysis in the rural black community, and in the lives of the black family.

However, economic forces in the North and in the South were to alter the lives of many of these rural black families drastically. Allan H. Spear, author of Black Chicago, describes these forces and their results:

> Just as opportunities were opening in the North, cotton culture experienced a crisis that uprooted thousands of Negroes in the black belts in the South. The Mexican boll weevil had crossed the Rio Grande in 1892. Steadily spreading its destruction north and eastward, it had, by 1915, ruined thousands of acres of crops in the cotton producing areas of Mississippi and Alabama and had just begun to ravage southwestern Georgia. The weevil did not destroy southern agriculture, but it made necessary a major reorganization: planters reduced their cotton acreage, altered their methods of planting and cultivating cotton, and put greater emphasis on food crops and livestock. Mixed farming required fewer laborers, and Negro croppers and laborers were in any case, untrained for the new agriculture. As a result, landowners reduced the number of tenants and workers

on their land, forcing many of them to seek work elsewhere.[1]

So by the thousands, black men and women flocked to the rapidly growing industrial centers of the North. Some men left their families with the intention of sending for them when they had earned funds sufficient for the reunion. However, opportunities for many of these men were not to be found; they ended up deserting their families and joined thousands of other men with no roots. In some instances entire families moved to the cities and sent for relatives to join them. As more and more relatives and friends flocked into the cities, jobs became scarce, the result unemployment, overcrowding, dissatisfied, disillusioned spouses and disrupted families.

The process was predictable. By the 1920's and 1930's, the average black family which had moved from the rural farm areas of the south to the industrialized areas of the north had undergone many drastic adjustments within the confining boundaries of the overcrowded ghetto. If the father was still part of the household, his authority, once undisputed, now depended upon the amount of economic support he provided for his family. The mother was more than likely employed in some menial position, usually domestic, and her status in the family could range from actual head of the

---

[1]Allan H. Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto 1890-1920 (Chicago and London, 1967), p. 132.

family to subordinate helpmate to her husband. Pressures of city life now separated the family which once worked so closely on the farm or in the fields. Each family member had his own peer group, and in the case of the younger family members supervision had been reduced and many of these associations may have led them into trouble. Meals, once eaten together, were now eaten in shifts. Social events were to be found everywhere in the city, therefore, the important role that the church once played in family life was absolved.

When the Depression hit, the shaky foundations which kept even these families together collapsed. The husband was now out of work completely and his authority at home was greatly reduced, if not nonexistent. This was true especially if the wife was still employed. Eventually, ego deflated, once more emasculated he deserts his family and the number of women headed households grows.

It is at this point that the black family becomes a subject for social scientists to study. Previously ignored as it developed in scope, at this point it becomes a source of speculation, and the question of the disorganized black family becomes a case for investigation and study.

CHAPTER III

THREE DECADES OF STUDIES BY SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

The Decade of the 1940's

On June 25, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt, President of the United States, issued an "executive order banning discrimination on account of race, creed, color or national origin in defense industries in the federal government, and created the committee on Fair Employment Practices to effectuate the order."[1] This action was taken after blacks, led by A. Phillip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, threatened to stage a massive march on Washington to protest injustices against them in this and other areas. The threat of such action at a time when unity among war torn America was imperative indicates that blacks during this decade were becoming an important political force, particularly in the urban areas in which they could be found in overwhelming numbers.

Federal decisions such as this, unprecedented political power and a prosperous post war economy, were instrumental in assisting black families in the 1940's. Where the rate

---

[1] Irving J. Sloan, ed., Blacks in America 1492-1970 (New York, 1971), p. 34.

of marriages had been low during the years of the Depression, it increased dramatically. Defense jobs, elevating men and women into supervisory and managerial positions, moved many black families up the socioeconomic scale.

Excellent opportunities for social activities to study various areas of the black man's life were presented as he exherted himself in numerous endeavors. On the brink of this decade, black social scientist E. Franklin Frazier made a comprehensive study in the previously neglected area of the black family. This classic study, The Negro Family in the United States,[1] traced the history of the black family from Africa, through slavery, reconstruction and urbanization to the condition he observed it to be in by 1939.

From Frazier's observations, no evidence that African culture had any influence on the black family's development in North America could be found; however, he designated slavery as having had a tremendous impact on this institution and on the social structure within the rural black community. The pattern of the matriarchal household, loose sexual relationships between adults, widespread illegitimacy, and other social ills which plagued the black family, he cited as being inherently related to the black man's heritage of slavery.

When these rural blacks, many of whom were already weak

---

[1]E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago and London, 1966).

in internalized family structure, relocated in the urban areas of many of their rural mores were met with hostile resistance. Social institutions prescribed acceptable behavioral patterns and readjustments had to be made, or sanctions were imposed. Welfare rolls increased as families, unable to make these adjustments, disintegrated. Those families who were fortunate enough to make the adjustment, raised their economic standard of living, and became financially secure enough to be designated as middle class. The emergence of this new middle class resulted in some confusion in ideas, goals and patterns of behavior which conflicted with those of the old established families who had claimed middle class status since emancipation.[1] He agreed that these families lacked the social graces, the morals and the class which their counterparts had had when they filled the void on the social ladder.

Frazier believed that the acculturation of the black family would come with closer association with the white majority, if barriers to employment were removed and the standard of living were raised. He states that "the gains in the white world will in the future as in the past be transmitted to future generations through the family."[2]

---

[1] Ibid., p. 365.

[2] Ibid., p. 368.

Black Metropolis,[1] a study conducted by two sociologists St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton in the Midwestern urban area of Chicago, Illinois, analyzed the development of black community life in an urban setting and the patterns of behavior, life styles and values emerging within the different class levels in this community. Their observations were much the same as Frazier's; those few blacks who had been fortunate enough to prosper during this decade of economic opportunity acquired those material possessions, attributed to a middle class life style. Such life styles encompassed the accumulation of material possessions, great emphasis on "getting ahead", and making the right connections. Family life was stable, and strict moral codes were adhered to. Black families on the lower socioeconomic level were characterized as living in overcrowded conditions, with numerous motherheaded households, many on welfare, in areas with high illegitimacy and juvenile rates. They attributed a great deal of the problems encountered by this latter socioeconomic group to the fact that "since slavery, Negro men have never been able to obtain, in the mass, good jobs long enough to build a solid economic base to support their families."[2]

Therefore, despite the depressing sociological observations

---

[1]St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City (2 vols.: New York, 1945), II.

[2]Ibid., p. 582.

about the conditions in which the majority of black families existed, an attitude of optimism prevailed among social scientists. It was indicative of the times. Collaberative efforts between blacks and whites during the war and strides made by blacks following these years awakened them to the possibilities of integration and assimilation into the larger white society. An adequate economic base was viewed as the most viable solution for the achievement of such an objective. The Federal Government was making it possible through the process of law for more and more blacks to obtain positions which would give them this base.

From June 24 to July 9, 1949, The Institute of Race Relations held meetings on the Fisk University campus, and the conclusions reached by this meeting prompted Mr. Charles Johnson, president of Fisk, to describe the decade of the 1940's as having been one of revolutionary proportions in race relations.

He went on to describe the achievements made:

> ....race issues have become a matter of universal concern; civil rights are now debated on a national, political level; race relations are recognized by the United Nations as included in the issue of human rights; Supreme Court decisions have outlawed white primaries, restrictions in housing, racial discrimination in labor unions; state courts, are recognizing the right to equal salaries for teachers....[1]

---

[1]Harry Hansen, ed., World Almanac and Book of Facts (New York, 1950), p. 285.

The Decade of the 1950's

In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States overruled the separate but equal doctrine of over fifty years and stated that separate but equal educational facilities were unequal. This decision further reinforced the optimism of the previous decade. With the removal of educational barriers, blacks could foresee the removal of yet another obstacle toward the improvement of their economic position. The court left compliance of this new law to the implementation of the society at large, the intensified feelings on the part of the white majority made the elation among blacks short lived; few schools were desegregated, North or South, and even fewer efforts were made to desegregate them.

A year later, in Birmingham, Alabama, blacks, led by a young minister, Martin Luther King, Jr., staged a year-long boycott in protest over the segregated public transportation system of that city. Its successful conclusion introduced a new era of Civil Rights, one in which blacks through visible, constructive action brought the injustices of America toward its largest minority to the forefront. With this small victory, hopes for the improvement of the black man's position in society on all levels once more ran high. Enthusiasm later waned, but the fire had been lit.

In 1957 the first Civil Rights Act since 1875 was passed by Congress. A Commission on Civil Rights was created through this bill, and the federal government was authorized

to bring civil suits against any person, group, or agency which threatened the right of any man to vote.

The degree and the extent of such discrimination is made even more vivid when one is confronted with the facts that "in 1950 the Negro reached levels that the whites achieved in 1920 (a gap of thirty years), but by 1960 he was where the whites were in 1925 (a gap of thirty-five years)."[1] Such realities were not condusive to an optimistic outlook within the black community as this decade came to an end.

The Decade of the 1960's

Activities in the area of Civil Rights were accelerated during this decade. Four North Carolina A & T College students introduced a new demonstration tactic, the sit-in, in a successful attempt to integrate a five and dime store in their city.[2] This move paved the way for continuous, open and defiant demonstrations throughout the sixties, under the leadership of Dr. King, resulting in significant gains in many areas including employment, housing, and the desegregation of public facilities and schools, North and South. By 1964, the massive demonstrations and protests resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Violation of any of the stated articles banning discrimination, in this act, was a federal

---

[1] Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark, The Negro American (Boston, 1967), p. 126.

[2] The Negro Handbook (Chicago, 1966), p. 48.

offense; violators were subject to federal prosecution.

This third Civil Rights Act in less than one hundred years failed to pacify blacks as the frustration increased; then, frustration turned to anger.

As significant as these events were, they were overshadowed by other events of this decade. Social scientists once again abandoned the black family as a topic of interest and diverted their attention to other areas of importance.

E. Franklin Frazier's Black Bourgeosie,[1] a study of the new black middle class, represents the one major study to emerge in this decade concerned with any aspect of the black family during this time. Characterized much the same as it had been in his earlier publication, this small but growing class consisted of blacks in diversified occupations from professionals to foremen who put great emphasis on family stability, material possessions and social status, the masses of blacks were not discussed.

For the most part, apathy toward the black men appeared to be indicative of this decade. Social legislation was passed, Supreme Court decisions were made and organized, demonstrations were conducted, but the welfare rolls and unemployment rates continued to climb in the black community. As laws and legislation went unheeded, the disillusionment among blacks increased.

The Commission on Civil Rights, established under the

---

[1]E. Franklin Frazier, Black Bourgeosie (Glencoe, Illinois, 1957).

1957 Civil Rights Act, issued a report to President Eisenhower in 1959, which described the continuing dilemma of the black man two years after this bill was passed. They found that millions of blacks were still being denied the right to vote in the South by the "creation of legal impediments, administrative obstacles, and positive discouragement engineered by fears of economic reprisals and physical harm."[1] From the summer of 1964 through the summer of 1965, the anger of Northern blacks was made visible. Riots and civil disorders engulfed every major black ghetto in this country. America was unprepared for the action. Prior to this the majority of the demonstrations of discontent had taken place in the South. The North had congratulated itself on its tolerance and understanding of black Americans over the years. Meanwhile, urban ghetto areas had been allowed to develop as they could, with social service agencies establishing rules and regulations and law enforcement agents seeing that they were enforced. Investigations transpired as to the causes of these disorders, a great deal of which were directed toward white businessmen in these areas and law enforcement officials. As a result of these investigations revelations of the conditions of urban black ghettoes were uncovered. Such investigations issued in the era of the War on Poverty, an attempt by the Johnson Administration to combat many of the social ills which plagued the nation's ghettoes.

---

[1]The Negro Handbook, op. cit., p. 118.

In 1966, on a march through Mississippi, Stokley Carmichael, director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, uttered the phrase Black Power. A new era began in the black community, an era of black pride. Many aspects of white society which had been emulated and imitated by the black population in the past now began to be questioned. Many blacks re-examined themselves, some previously held values were retained, others were rejected. A period of awareness among blacks, young and old, began.

The poverty program and black awareness brought a resurgence of interest in blacks among social scientists. Urban black families, as the social unit through which the socialization process is transmitted, became the focus of attention.

In 1965, the first major study on the black family in almost two decades, was released, The Negro Family: The Case For National Action.[1] It was popularly referred to as the Moynihan Report, after Daniel Moynihan, the director of the research project. The study took the position that the deterioration within black society, the high illegitimacy, juvenile delinquency and crime rates, was a result of the deterioration of the black family.

The Moynihan Report traced the historical aspect of the black family's development, then using the impact of

---

[1]U. S. Department of Labor, Office of Planning and Research, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (Washington, D. C., 1965).

urbanization explained the economic and social situation which put many black families in precarious positions. The report stated that because many blacks have large families, and low incomes, black fathers find themselves unable to support their families properly. Therefore, due to inadequate wages, unemployment or absentee fathers, the black woman goes into the labor market. At the time of the report, fifty percent (50) of Negro women, age twenty-five (25) to sixty-five (65), were employed; forty-two percent (42) of white women worked.[1] Because of the family's dependence on the women's income, the father's role as primary provider for the family was reduced. The result was separation, divorce, or desertion on the part of the male and a matriarchal household.

It is this matriarchal system which had developed within many black families that the report determined was the most important element of disorganized family life.

> In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well.[2]

The Monyihan Report was, the most controversial study of this decade. It resulted in numerous studies on the black family from every aspect, by many social scientists.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 25.

[2] Ibid., p. 29.

Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Street Corner Men,[1] by anthropologist Elliot Liebow, investigated the black family by studying the adult black male, and his relationship to the community. He observed that marriage, children and family, was a system of loose relationships which defined status and manhood to the street corner men he observed.

> In theory marriage is a 'big thing', it is the way to manhood with all its attendant responsibilities, duties, and obligations which, when discharged, bring one status and respectability. In fact, marriage is an occasion of failure in the critical area of manhood, and therefore leads, to a diminished status and loss of respectability.[2]

He viewed the black family as disfunctional because of the inability of the man, and the inability of his family to accept the man's weakness.

> For many Negro men, jobs alone are no longer enough. Before he can earn a living, he must believe that he can do so, and his women and children must learn to believe this along with him. But they find it difficult to give their support until he begins.[3]

Sociologist, Jessie Bernard, produced an analytical study of the black family in Marriage and Family Among Negroes published in 1966. She discussed the two cultures under which the black family must live, the people involved in the marriage itself, and the socialization of black families

---

[1] Elliot Liebow, Tally's Corner: A Study of Black Street Corner Men (Boston and Toronto, 1967).

[2] Ibid., p. 115.

[3] Ibid., p. 224.

into the mainstream of society, as factors contributing to its unique formation.

Clarifying the fact that there are two distinct types in black society, respectable and nonrespectable, and that an understanding of family patterns among blacks cannot be distinguished unless these patterns can be recognized, she focuses attention on the individuals in the family situation, and the social forces which have affected their roles. She especially emphasizes the sexual fears of the white majority toward black males which has hindered much of the progress he could have made in the past; furthermore, she views this as an intricate part of the relationship between black males and black females, their family life, and their relationship to the society as a whole.

Andrew Billingsley, quoted previously wrote, Black Families in White America in 1968. The book points out many areas of the black family which have been distorted, or ignored in previous sociological studies, and examines them from his point of view.

> Our view is that obstacles facing the Negro family in our society are both economic and social, both class and race, as we interpret race. It is both slavery and current discrimination, plus other factors which stand in the way of Negro family achievement.[1]

He goes on to suggest several strategies which should be considered by white society in order to improve the cohesion within the black family and the black community.

---

[1]Billingsley, op. cit., p. 195.

Significant among these suggestions were an examination and elimination of racism and the illusion of white superiority in the society at large; also, the elimination of the high priority placed on stability as the major problem facing black families. The primary problem is that of black survival in a hostile white society.

Hope, frustration, disillusionment and anger were expressions of three decades of the black man's struggle in American society. For the black family they were times of change, many families elevated their socioeconomic status and attempted to integrate and assimilate into the larger society only to find doors closed to them.

Social scientists expressed ambiguity and diversification in their studies about the black family. The matriarchy system found within many black families appeared to be the most pertinent area of study by the decade of the sixties. Changes in attitude on many levels influenced many of these studies profoundly, and such changes were to continue to influence future studies.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT-1970's

By 1970, the major Civil Rights demonstrations were at an end; however, the 1960's had left a definite impact on Afro-Americans as they moved into a new decade. A shift in attitude had occured within the black community and it had affected all socioeconomic levels.

Sidney Kronus, in The Black Middle Class,[1] described the changes within this particular class as follows:

> The first of these is the interracial stance which is changing from the traditional pattern of attempting to emulate 'whiteness' by courting whites, using white role models, accepting white domination and degrading the black man and his uniqueness to a position that now values the inherent human dignity of the black man, his culture, and the capabilities that he has as a man.
>
> The second change is in the interracial stance and is the shift from the class orientation (the middle-class black for the black middle class) to a mass orientation (the middle-class black for the black man) which results in a psychological shift from that of self hatred to pride in one-self.[2]

Social scientists of today still focusing their attention on the black family, have shifted their attention from the limited subject of the disorganized black family, to other

---

[1] Sidney Kronus, The Black Middle Class (Columbus, Ohio, 1971).

[2] Ibid., p. 14.

areas within it. The middle-class black family, the positive attributes of the black family, and the relationships between black men and black women, which greatly influences the formation and endurance of the family.

Presently, the black family on the middle socioeconomic class level is characterized as conjugal in nature. The majority of these families have both the husband and wife employed to maintain a middle class standard of living. Family sizes remain small; ambitions for their children remain high. The styles of living vary from simple and frugal, to ostentatious and pretentious.

Black family patterns for those below the middle socio-economic level are predominately conjugal as well. The pattern of life styles differ according to the economic situation within the household; family sizes are large, and authority and decision making usually equalitarian. Both parents, as in the middle income level, are more then likely employed.

Sociologist John Scanzoni, focuses his study on the black middle class family because he feels that it is a previously neglected area among social scientists. In The Black Family in Modern Society,[1] he studies the black family through a scientific and systematic method of research; investigating the inter-relationships between family backgrounds

---

[1]John H. Scanzoni, The Black Family in Modern Society (Boston, 1971).

identification with parents, achievement and mobility, husband-wife relationships, family functionality and child rearing practices, as they affect the black family at its present stage.[1] He investigates areas of the black family previously ignored, and channels possible investigation into other areas of study concentrating on the black family.

Other sociologists continue to investigate the much disputed matriarchal system. Many contemporary social scientists take issue with the suggested implications of this system, as originally perceived by Moynihan.

Sociologist Jacquelyne J. Jackson takes, perhaps, the most unique viewpoint concerning "the problem" of black female headed households. She states "that it is not a problem at all when we recognize that there is not an equal supply of black males to black females." She suggests that emphasis be placed on programs to develop the education, skills, and employment opportunities of black women, who must head households, instead of on the myth of the matriarchy.

Robert Staples approaches "the problem" of female headed households from a totally different perspective. He suggests that males might best be prepared for the future roles as husbands by being indocterinated with the knowledge of their African heritage, which perpetrated "patrilineal and

---

[1]Jacquelyne J. Jackson, "Where are the Black Men?" Ebony, Vol. XXVII, No. 5 (March, 1972), 100.

patriarchal forms of family organization."[1]

While, Robert Hill, yet another young black sociologist chooses to study the strengths of the black family, rather than dwell on its weaknesses. He believes that the disintegration, disorganization and pathology of the black family have been overworked, and identifies five basic strengths which, through his examination of literature, he feels characterizes the black family: (1) strong kinship bonds, (2) strong work orientation, (3) adaptability of family roles, (4) strong achievement orientation, and (5) strong religious orientation."[2]

Elaborating on each of these points, he uses his summations to illustrate how each strength had contributed to the resiliency, advancement and stability of the black family, and contributes to its functioning until the present.

Studies such as these dramatize the diversification in thought which has emerged since the 1940's. It is this decade which continues to exemplify the changes in thought about, and toward, the black family by social scientists.

---

[1]Robert Staples, The Black Family: Essays and Studies (Belmont, California, 1971), p. 167.

[2]Robert B. Hill, The Strengths of Black Families (New York, 1971), p. 4.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In 1939, Frazier observed that he could find no trace of African heritage in the formation of the black family in North America. By 1971 Robert Staples was suggesting the indoctrination of the black male in society with the knowledge of his African heritage, including the patriarchal form of family organization, in order to prepare him for marriage. Such diversity is indicative of the impact which changes in society have had upon the viewpoints of social scientists over such a short period of time.

Through these decades not only did social scientists record their observations about the black family, but they also, indirectly, recorded the observation which black families were making about themselves. Frazier, Cayton and Drake, recounted the high esteem which the few middle income black families put on the life styles, behavior patterns and values of the white majority. Such attitudes reflect low esteem among blacks for themselves. Thirty years later, Kronus observes that many of these values were in question and although life styles had not varied much, self esteem was high among this same class.

Sociologists of this earlier period, as they studied the family, reveal repeatedly their acceptance of this negative attitude which the black family had about itself. Frazier's contempt for blacks who lacked what he felt to be the finer social graces of the white majority, was obvious. He viewed social ills which stemmed from the conditions under which the majority of black families lived as directly connected with some general characteristic of lower economic blacks.

Resurgence of this similar point of view can be denoted in parts of Moynihan's Report in the 1960's. Social ills are viewed as directly related to family structure, instead of the institutionalized racism which has suppressed the black man since slavery. However, there is a noticeable difference between the amount of acceptance which these viewpoints met in each of these decades. On the brink of the 1940's, for the most part, much of Frazier's work went unchallenged for a long period of time, while Moynihan's Report caused extensive rebuttals. Each of these reactions is an indicant of the changes of the times.

It could be stated that during periods of great political and social movements when the threat of physical aggression were present, society began to show some recognized attention to its black population. Sociologists being part of society as well as observers of it are conditioned to react to these changes; negatively, and positively, and when

society increases its interest in such institutions as the black family, their interest shifts toward this subject. The social scientists is a product of this society and his job is to study every aspect of it.

After examining the varied studies made by social scientists the observation can be made that few of these studies, during any of these decades, were objective in evaluating the black family. White social scientists by virtue of their race are part of the institutionalized system of racism that has subjegated blacks since slavery, therefore they have great difficulty studying the black family without bias. To obtain any notable degree of objectivity in observations about the black family, one must come from outside of the society which is to be studied, yet still be familiar with the complexities of the underlying causes within that society which have produced such a family. However, by virtue of the fact that the black family is studied because it is viewed as a deviant form, bias formulates from the conception.

Black social scientists cannot register complete objectivity either. They are on the other side of the spectrum, their studies are reactionary and contain bias from another viewpoint. As blacks they have been subjected to the indignities and the injustices of white society, therefore, emotionalism may enter what is to be a scientific study. Such observations can be noticed especially during

the contemporary decades, among black social scientists Billingsley, Hill and Staples.

One can well understand the complexities involved when social scientists attempt to identify the cause and effects of the black family's dilemma in this country. As society develops these complexities accumulate and solutions to the problems become more acute, yet more evasive.

During the earlier decades, social scientists viewed the urban black family simply, because the solution to its developing into a strong institution appeared to be simple. As time passed, the simple viewpoint became less simple. The introduction of attitude changes, cultural awareness and self pride, decreased the objective of complete assimilation into the white society for many blacks, and the role of the black family, as the transmitter of these cultural and social norms had to be viewed from other perspectives.

While all of the speculation and studies made during these past few years may have had some affect on the perspective from which many urban black families are now viewed by social scientists, it does not alter the fact that the lower income black family finds itself in much the same condition today as it did thirty-odd years ago. Illegitimacy rates are higher, as are juvenile delinquency rates. Many households are female headed, and welfare rolls continue to grow. "Approximately 29 percent of the Negro

families have incomes below the Federal "poverty level" ($3,553 for a non-farm family of four). In more detail, 23 percent have annual incomes below $3,000 and 45 percent below $5,000. Only 9 percent of the white families have incomes of less than $3,000 and 20 percent less than $5,000."[1]

Thirty-four years after E. Franklin Frazier's extensive analysis of the black family, social scientists still use his basic concepts from which they develop their studies, despite the diversification in their viewpoints about the subject. However, despite the fact that such a thorough analysis of the black family has not been presented since Frazier, contemporary social scientists appear to have arrived at a consensus in observing that the masses of black families still exist on the lowest socio-economic level under conditions which continue to deteriorate rapidly with each passing year. Social scientists in recording such observations can only reflect what a racist American society has, and continues to produce.

---

[1]Luman H. Long, ed., The World Almanac and Book of Facts (New York, New York and Cleveland, Ohio, 1971), p. 45.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Adoff, Arnold, ed. Black on Black: Commentaries by Negro Americans. Toronto Ontario: Collier-MacMillan Canada Ltd., 1968.

Bennett, Lerone Jr. Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America 1619-1964. Baltimore, Maryland: Peguin Books, 1966.

Bergman, Peter M. The Chronological History of the Negro in America. New York, Evanston, London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969.

Bernard, Jessie. Marriage and Family Among Negroes. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966.

Billingsley, Andrew. Black Families in White America. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968.

Drake, St. Clair and Cayton, Horace R. Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., Volume II, 1945.

Frazier, E. Franklin. Black Bouregoisie. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1957.

_____. The Free Negro Family. Nashville, Tennessee: Fisk University Press, 1932.

_____. The Negro Family in the United States. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Hill, Robert B. The Strengths of Black Families. New York: Emerson Hall Publishers, Inc., 1971.

Kronus, Sidney. The Black Middle Class. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1971.

Liebow, Elliot. Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Street Corner Men. Boston & Toronto: Little,Brown and Company, 1967.

Long, Luman H. The World Almanac and Book of Facts. New York, New York and Cleveland, Ohio: Newspaper Enterprise Associates, Inc., 1971.

McCord, William, Howard, John, Friedberg, Bernard, and Harwood, Edwin. Life Styles in the Black Ghetto. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1971.

Parsons, Talcott and Clark, Kenneth B., ed. The Negro American. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

Pinkney, Alphonso. Black Americans. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969.

Rainwater, Lee. Behind Ghetto Walls. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970.

Rainwater, Lee and Yancey, William L. The Monynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy. Cambridge, Mass.,London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1967.

Scanzoni, John H. The Black Family in Modern Society. Boston: Allyn and Beacon, Inc., 1971.

Sloan, Irving J., ed. Blacks in America 1492-1970. Bobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1971.

Spear, Allan H. Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Staples, Robert. The Black Family: Essays and Studies. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1971.

_____. The Negro Handbook. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1966.

The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1940-1971.

Willie, Charles V. The Family Life of Black People. Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill Publishing Co., 1970.

Woodward, C. Vann. The Strange Career of Jim Crow. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Public Documents

U. S. Department of Labor, Office of Planning and Research. The Negro Family: The Case for National Action. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965.

Articles

Jackson, Jacquelyne J. "Where are the Black Men?" Ebony, Vol. XXVII, No. 5 (March, 1972), 99-102.

"Two Shades of Black: The Negro Family," Newsweek, Vol. LXXIV, No. 20 (November 17, 1969), 119-20.

Unpublished Material

Stroman, Carolyn. "Towards a Sociology of the Black Family: A Bibliographic Essay." Unpublished Master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1973.